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THE THEATRE AT SIKYON

[PLATES VIII, IX]

ON a visit to the theatre at Sikyon in the summer of 1898, I was convinced that it would be necessary for the correct understanding of the stage buildings to uncover the front wall throughout its entire length, and to clear the west ramp and parodos. After obtaining a permit from the Ephor-General, I started with a half-dozen men and found, in a few days, to my great satisfaction, the remains of both the paraskenia and the double gateway of the west ramp and parodos. In taking measurements of the new discoveries it soon became apparent that the plan drawn after the first campaign, in 1886, was incorrect, and that it was necessary to remeasure the entire building for a new plan (PLATE VIII).

The auditorium being almost wholly sunk into the hill, high retaining walls were required along the parodoi. The architect had availed himself of natural advantages.[1] Huge ledges of rock cropping out of the hillside were cut and dressed in line with the parodoi, and shaped in such a way as to combine with masonry in semi-polygonal fashion. The natural strength of this construction seemed to preclude the necessity of a double wall. But so powerful has been the pressure from behind, or the force of earthquakes, that the upper parts have toppled over, and the walls yet standing lean forward. The courses being horizontal, the lower ones stop short as the ground rises, while the top of the walls recedes with the rising tiers of the auditorium.

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[1] *Am. J. Arch.*, First Series, V, pp. 267–292 and pls. vi–ix, and VIII, pp. 388–409 and pl. xiii. (Reprinted in *Papers of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, vol. V, pp. 1–26, plan and pls. i and ii; and vol. VI, pp. 1–22 and pl. i.)

On the east side the blocks are cut on a "bias" with a sharp edge, but on the west side there rises at the end of the last block in each course a triangular piece against which the next block above abuts. This was probably intended to withstand the longitudinal thrust of the wall, and, besides, the blocks would not have to be brought to a feather edge. This wall terminated in a pedestal, cut in one piece with the last block in the second course. Around the top on three sides runs a double moulding, which continued along the coping stones that once covered the walls. Of this two blocks remain; and holes along the top of the walls show where iron pins once held them fast. The purpose of a rebate on the inner side is not apparent.

Horizontally the auditorium seems to be divided into three sections by two diazomata. The lower ones appear to be nearly of the same size, and to terminate with the analemmata, while the upper is a smaller part of a circle. The lower diazoma is entered from without by two vaulted passages that penetrate the sides of the auditorium. The approaches to the upper section appear to have been around the ends.

Sixteen stairways divide the lower section into fifteen wedges. How the stairways continued in the upper sections is not known, as the excavators have uncovered only the two lower tiers of ordinary seats on the west side. Leake supposed that there were in all forty tiers of seats, and his estimate has been followed by those who have since considered this point;[1] but a distance of 58.41 m. measured over the rough ground from the back of the armchairs to the topmost seat, yields with ample allowances for two diazomata half again as many. Each tier has one step which slants enough to make up for the difference in height. Below the ordinary seats five continuous tiers constitute the foundation of the auditorium. The fourth course appears only in the stairways and in the end wedges where the armchairs stand one tier higher. The lowest course of the auditorium forms the outer curb of the water conduit, and supports the bridges leading to the stairways. The inner curb completes a semicircle, and turns to join the outer curb opposite the second stairway on either side. From a point in the line of the axis, the water was carried away by a canal lying under the orchestra and the stage building. Under the *scenae frons* this canal shifts half its own width to the right, and then continues, diverging a little to the right.

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[1] Leake, *Travels in the Morea*, III, p. 369.

A great mass of earth still covers a part of the orchestra, making it impossible to obtain complete measurements. To guard against serious error I measured along the auditorium circle at intervals of 0.50 m. from several points. The diameter appears to be 24.04 m. or some 4.00 m. longer than indicated on the plan of 1889. The curve is fairly regular for 180 degrees, or up to the second stairway, then it enlarges slightly, as if drawn with longer radii. Had the courses continued on the same curve, they would have met the analemmata at sharp angles, and protruded far into the orchestra. Still further to obviate these inconvenient angles, some of the lower courses are cut in toward the ends and the analemmata recede somewhat, the distance between them being 23.40 m.

The skene occupies a rocky mass, which rises on both sides about three metres above the orchestra. This had to be removed for the chambers of the ground floor. Although a huge block still remains at the west end, there are indications to show that this, also, was to have been quarried away, leaving the native rock only in the ramps and in the flight of the wall. In this way the rock-cut walls must date from the first period of the construction. From the absence of rock-cut walls in the middle of the skene, we infer that a natural depression once followed the axis of the theatre.

The oblong AEE′A′ (PLATE VIII) is divided by three longitudinal walls into four compartments, and is flanked on both sides by one large room and two parallel ramps. While the lower courses of the three middle walls abutted against the mass of rock still standing at the west end, the upper courses ran the full length of the skene.

On the northeast corner we have a large room, 9.05 m. x 7.88 m., the lower part of which is hewn out of the rock. There runs along all the walls a seat interrupted only at the door. The walls were evidently once covered by stucco, which is now nearly gone. The floor is 0.14 m. below the stylobate of the proskenion, and is reached by two steps.[1]

The corresponding space on the opposite side falls into three levels, which rise respectively from north to south 0.87 m., 0.90 m., and 2.01 m. above the proskenion stylobate. The irregular space between the reservoir and the ramp lies even with the ground on the west side, whence alone it could be entered. Had it been sunk to the level of the other chambers, several steps would have been required to reach the bottom. No wall appears to have existed on this side, and this room, like one of those at Epidauros, seems never to have been finished. Perhaps, as M. Lechat suggests, it was intended for the housing of animals connected with the theatre.[2]

Between the rooms on the extreme corners lies bedded on the rock a stylobate of conglomerate, 0.20 m. high, 0.62 m. wide, and 24.18 m. long. Dressed smooth only 0.05 m. down the sides, it must have lain nearly in the ancient level. A series of fifteen dowel-holes, at an average distance of 1.71 m., is found in the upper surface. At the west and east ends the distances are 1.56 m. and 1.60 m., which points to a superstructure in the Doric order. In 1886 a part of a Doric column in poros apparently *in situ* was found at the west end.[3]

The next wall, DD′, lies 2.88 m. distant, and is largely rock-cut. It is in a crumbling condition, and over one metre at the cross wall is now gone. Turning at right angles to form *antae*, it leaves a broad passage, 3.61 m. wide, in the middle of the skene. A narrow partition coated with the same plaster as in the reservoir, juts out about one metre from both corners ; but how it was closed does not appear, as everything was broken away when the drain was opened.

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[1] Dr. A. S. Cooley, then working at Corinth, brought the instrument over and levelled the theatre.

[2] Defrasse et Lechat, *Épidaure*, p. 210.

[3] *Papers of the American School at Athens*, V, p. 9.

The middle wall, CC′, of the skene, is clearly of different periods, and deserves especial attention. Beginning at the east end, we have a stretch of *opus incertum* as far as the cross wall, then a good Greek wall to the rocky mass, a remnant of *opus incertum* again on the top of the rock, and, finally, an irregular, rock-cut ridge. This wall also has in the middle the same wide passage that we found in DD′. The last block on the west side is cut into a T-shape, the crosspiece being in line with similar projections from walls DD′ and BB′. On the east side of the passage the corresponding series of antae is lacking only on the north side of this wall. Later, this passage was narrowed by adding on either side a stub 0.75 m. long. Here mortar is used, and the courses are not bonded with the neighboring wall. As elsewhere, the rock-cut and Greek walls belong to the first period, while the *opus incertum* dates from a Roman reconstruction.

The wall BB′ is of poros, except a short piece of rock-cut wall at the east end. The stretch east of the door is of excellent workmanship, and compares favorably with the best walls in the theatre. West of the door both the material and the construction are somewhat irregular. The ends of the skene were closed by the native rock, the rock-cut walls, and above these by masonry. The thickness of these walls appears to have been 0.78 m., or that of the partition walls between the skene and the large corner room R ; for on the opposite side of the skene the beddings in the rock C′D′ and an irregular ridge B′C′ show this width.

The rock on the west side comes within 2.75 m. of the middle passage. At the same distance east of the passage we have still another anta by the wall BB′. If this is the remnant of a series of antae along the line HI, then the remainder of the rock at the west end, OPD′B′, is exactly equivalent to the area HIDB. Whether the original plan of the skene had five divisions[1] or only two long chambers on either side of the middle passage, the narrow partition FG, which divides the ground floor into two unequal sections, 6.84 m. and 9.50 m. long, was constructed, when the builders failed to remove the rock from the west end. Now the east end of the wall CC′ was, if already built, removed to make a large chamber.

Corresponding to the stoa in the rear we have the proskenion in front. This long hall is cut 0.48 m. farther into the rock at both ends. Here the end walls were only 0.30 m. wide, as appears from beddings in the rock at the west end, as well as from the pilasters that project forward. In front we have evidently the foundations of a proskenion and paraskenia. Between the rock-cut ramps lies a poros stylobate 0.46 m. wide and 23.70 m. long. At both ends where stood the paraskenia it is about 1.42 m. wide for a distance of 2.90 m. Along the stylobate we find a series of dowel-holes, arranged in fourteen pairs at fairly regular intervals. From the middle of each pair to that of the next, we have an average distance of 1.47 m. When we reach the projections we find, about 0.40 m. in front of the last pair and 0.15 m. from the inner edge of the projections, a small dowel-hole, 0.08 m. × 0.105 m., and 0.08 m. deep on the east side, and 0.055 m. × 0.16 m., and 0.09 m. deep on the west side. By the outer edge adjoining the ramps we have still *in situ* the shattered bases of an Ionic pilaster 0.93 m. long. One side was adjusted into the native rock (PLATE IX), while a dowel corresponding to a large dowel-hole, 0.16 m. × 0.28 m., in the stylobate, and a notch in the pilaster secured it on the other.[2] Narrow at the middle, it widens in front and ends in an Ionic pilaster. The base is unique; it shows the usual Attic form, but has a plinth, and lacks the lower torus — a form which I have not been able to find elsewhere. Restoring both sides alike, we find the lower diameter of about 0.35 m. Barely five flutings remain on the east base, and less than one on the other. The material is poros coated with a fine stucco, the brilliancy of which had not yet faded. A small dowel-hole was found under the front part of the pilaster. A broken capital with volutes facing four sides, as at Epidauros, lies under a Roman basis surmounting the pilaster at the west end; for, when this wall was rebuilt in Roman times, two marble bases, both of which remain *in situ* at the west end, replaced the projecting pilasters of the earlier proskenion.[1] Under the outer one is built the broken Ionic capital of the same size and material as the pilasters themselves. Its volutes are placed at an angle of forty-five degrees, and it may have surmounted the very pilaster on the base of which it now rests.

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[1] This partial division into five rooms reminds us of the old skene at Eretria, but Otto Puchstein is no doubt right in assigning it to another type, *Die Griechische Bühne*, pp. 77 ff.

[2] For some of the measurements of this pilaster I am indebted to Professor Rufus B. Richardson, who, with members of the School, visited Sikyon in 1901.

It is now evident that we must restore a similar pilaster on the opposite side of each paraskenion where we found three dowel-holes. Unlike the pilasters at the ends these stood free and had to be secured by dowel-holes on both sides. The distance from centre to centre is 2.47 m. The discovery of these pilasters is of the utmost importance in determining the character of the front wall. It now appears that we must here, as in the paraskenia, allow one stone pilaster for each pair of dowel-holes, and that the theory of wooden posts, about which so much has been written, is entirely wrong. By reason of the narrow stylobate of the proskenion the pilasters could not have advanced so far to the front as in the paraskenia. But even as I have drawn them, they run over the edge, which was possible, standing as they do on the level of the orchestra.

At Epidauros the pilasters were made with frames for the pinakes;[2] but at Sikyon the frames must have been in separate pieces and fastened in the dowel-holes on each side of the pilasters. A pair of small holes midway between the larger ones seem to have been used in connection with the pinakes. There was no doubt a door in the middle of this wall, but all traces of it have disappeared with the middle block of the stylobate. The Roman wall at any rate had three doors.

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[1] See plan of 1889, *Am. J. Arch.* First Series, V, pl. ix.

[2] Dörpfeld, *Das Griechische Theater*, p. 125.

The height of the proskenion is obtained from the slant of the ramps. The east ramp shows a wave in its surface and discontinues 5.78 m. from the threshold of the parodos, so that it is not altogether satisfactory for our purpose. The ramp on the west side appeared at first to be in a still more hopeless condition; but, on clearing it, I found that the inner edge was intact and maintained a regular slant to a point within 0.86 m. of the bedding for the end wall of the proskenion, or 1.16 m. of the edge of the rock. A line fastened at the bottom of the ramp and following the incline intersected a plummet line 3.25 m. above the level of the stylobate. Calculations based upon the levels of the stylobate, the bottom of the ramp, and the highest point of the slant (3.05 m.) yield the same result. This amounts to eleven Roman feet of 0.295 m. and strikes the mean in the rule of Vitruvius that the podium is not to be less than 10 nor more than 12 feet high. The width of the podium was about 2.80 m. Whether doors closed the ends of the podium cannot now be determined from the ruins, as the top of the rock has crumbled away. A cross-wall, only 0.30 m. wide, in the foundation militates against this view. Nor is there a trace of any wall or railing along the outer edge of the ramps.

Along the wall E′A′ the top of the ramp is about 2.50 m. and the bottom of the parodos 4.66 m. wide, while at the bottom of the ramp and the top of the parodos they have a width of 1.82 m. and 3.15 m. respectively. Here they were still further narrowed by the construction of a gateway on the common level, so that the actual entrance to the ramp did not exceed 1.30 m. and that of the parodos 2.48 m. The remains of this gateway are few: a dowel-hole by the analemma and a poros pillar broken off 1.90 m. above the base, a threshold across the parodos, a limestone block with two dowel-holes, where the central pier was located, and finally another dowel-hole by the ramp wall. A block 0.65 m. long and of this outline seems to have come from the central pier (Fig. 1). A much larger block likewise of poros found on the ramp wall must have belonged to the entablature. Its outline will remind the reader of the corresponding member in the gateway of the theatre at Epidauros.

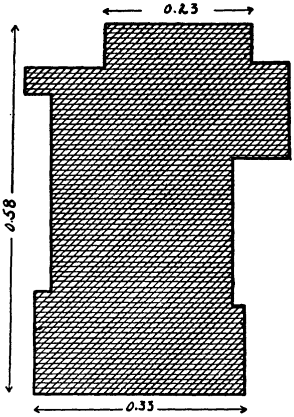

FIGURE 1. — A BLOCK FROM THE CENTRAL PIER.

Back of these ramps we have another pair of ramps leading into the second story of the skene. These must have afforded the regular means of communication between the two levels, since we have no trace of a stairway in the building. We possess no certain indications to determine the height of the stage-building. While the corner rooms and the stoa did not in all probability rise above one story, the skene proper had at least two. Some scenes require a flat roof, and holes in the buttresses along wall BB′ seem to have held beams reaching through the second story.

This theatre is the first of which there is any trace in this place. The plan is harmonious and must have been designed at one time. Slight differences in the execution may be due to different contractors or to the fact that the building dragged over a long period. The stoa, although it belongs to the original plan, was probably the last to be completed.

This theatre is mentioned by only two ancient authorities. Pausanias passes through the building on his wandering through the city;[1] Plutarch relates how the theatre was thronged one morning in consequence of the uprising under Aratos.[2] According to the last passage the theatre was in use in the year 251 B.C. In 302 B.C. the city was transferred from the plain and rebuilt on the plateau of the former acropolis with the aid of Demetrios Poliorketes.[1] If the theatre had been planned with the rest of the city at this time, it would in the ordinary course of construction have been completed during the first half of the third century. The regular plan of the city can yet be followed in many places. Priene and Ephesus are good examples of the method in which the streets intersect each other at right angles and conform rigidly to a rectilinear system. At Sikyon all the ruins in the neighborhood of the theatre are built according to this rectilinear plan: one set of walls runs six degrees east of north and the other six degrees south of east, cutting the former at right angles.[2] Two of these walls would, if prolonged, intersect at the middle column of the stoa. The axis, however, of the theatre, instead of bisecting the angle into two of forty-five degrees each, makes one side thirty-nine and the other fifty-one degrees. Thus the theatre is neither parallel with the streets, nor can it have been intended to stand at angles of forty-five degrees to them, as there is a difference of twelve degrees between the two sides. None of the other walls that I observed varied over one degree either way. At Priene[3] and Ephesus[4] and in cities built according to a regular plan we find the theatres aligned with the streets.[5] From this we should conclude that the theatre was already in its present position in 302 B.C.

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[1] Paus. II, 7, 5.

[2] Plutarch, *Arat.* 8.

In describing the building I have often called attention to similar features in the theatre at Epidauros. One recognizes at a glance the similarity in the construction of the paraskenia, in the double ramps, in the double gateway of the ramps and parodoi, and in the large corner rooms. The material of the front wall in both cases is poros coated with fine white stucco. The Ionic order reigns in both, and the capitals have faces to four sides. The paraskenia pass by a couple of notches into the ramp walls. The length of the front wall is the diameter of the orchestra circle.[1] From these resemblances it is evident that the architect of the one was familiar with the other. But side by side with these similarities we observe some striking contrasts. Without referring to the harmony and finish in the theatre at Epidauros, which is due to the genius of the architect, we find better construction in the front wall and in the semicircular water conduit. The enlargement of the auditorium circle is likewise better solved and the division of the auditorium into kerkides is not overdone as at Sikyon. This comparison makes the theatre at Sikyon the earlier one and brings it well into the fourth century. But how much earlier it may be, is an open question.

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[1] Diod. I, 20, 102.

[2] Cf. *Expédition Scientifique de Morée*, pl. 81.

[3] Wiegand, *Athen. Mitt.* XXVI, p. 120.

[4] *Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts in Wien:* I, 1898, Beiblatt, sp. 61–62, and V, Beiblatt, sp. 53 ff.

[5] M. Albert Ballu, *Thamugadi.*

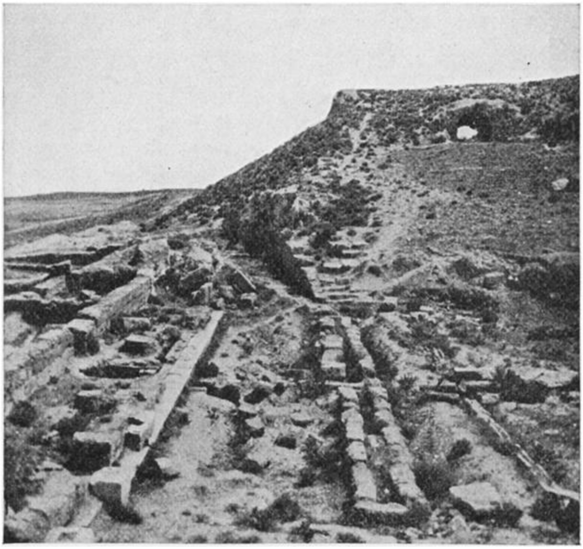

FIGURE 2. — THEATRE AT SIKYON: FROM THE WEST PARODOS.

Kleisthenes had been active on the hill of Sikyon. We have already associated his name with the stoa in the agora and with the agonistic games which were always held on the hill; and if the Dionysos to whom he gave the tragic choruses[1] taken from Adrastos was located below the theatre, where Pausanias saw the temple of this god, we have here a very ancient landmark.

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[1] Dörpfeld, *Das Griechische Theater*, p. 124.

A shallow trench lined with a course of rough poros blocks runs across the orchestra about 5 m. in front of the proskenion (see Figs. 2 and 3). The blocks on the sides lie in irregular lines and seem to have been violently disturbed. The trench is about 0.40 m. wide and comes within 2 m. of the analemmata. The blocks must have lain fairly even with the level of the orchestra; for of eleven levels taken at different points one is 0.03 m. above, four even with, and the rest below the stylobate of the proskenion. This trench seems to have been connected with a wooden stage fronting on this line. For its length corresponds to the distance between the paraskenia and,

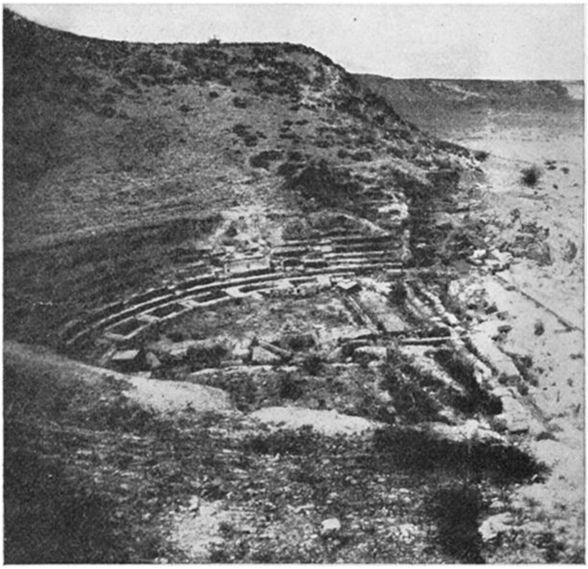

FIGURE 3. — THEATRE AT SIKYON: FROM BELOW THE EASTERN ARCHED ENTRANCE.

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[1] Herod. V, 67.

like the so-called Phaedrus stage at Athens, it is situated opposite the analemmata and leaves sufficient space for passages into the orchestra on both sides.[1]

In front of the poros stylobate of the proskenion lies a row of thirteen marble blocks 0.58 m. wide and 18.85 m. long. As the clamps are gone and the clamp holes do not correspond in the adjoining blocks, they could not originally have been intended for this use. The mason marks also point to a different sequence.[2] Except the first one from the east, eight are from the corners and four from the sides of another building. The intercolumnium of the former was between 1.39 m. and 1.45 m. and of the latter 1.53 m. Of the corner blocks two are of the long and six of the short kind. From the number six one is tempted to assume that they come from the six corners of an older proskenion, and Dr. Dörpfeld arranges them in the form of paraskenia projecting 3.24 m. and 4.94 m. wide. This size, however, is rather large and would reduce the parodoi to 1.24 m. If a marble stylobate occupied this line, it must have been taken up and replaced by these blocks. After all the fact that we find six corner blocks of the same kind is the only indication of the existence of a marble proskenion. As they now lie, at any rate, they form the surbase of an *opus incertum* wall, which covers 0.18 m. of these marble blocks and extends beyond them in a line to the ramps on both sides.

Before much of this wall was demolished (in 1891), it had three doorways. Two of the doorways being protected from the weather on the west side still retained traces of coloring when they were uncovered. The front side of this wall had no doubt been treated in the same way. In the places occupied by the pilasters of the first paraskenia we find at the west end two square blocks with large holes in the upper surface.[1] Two similar blocks must be restored on the east side, where the foundation of the outer one still remains over the broken pilaster. A broken corner capital of the poros proskenion is built into the foundation over the pilaster at the west end. The finding of a capital of the first proskenion in the foundation of the *opus incertum* wall is evidence that it was removed for this reconstruction rather than for a marble proskenion and then after a century or two found its way to its original place. The height of the front wall remained the same, as appears from the condition of the ramps. The *opus incertum* parts of CC′ are of the same character and seem to have been built at the same time. The object of this reconstruction was to deepen the stage according to the method adopted at Priene. BB′ was now removed above the level of the podium and CC′ became the new *scenae frons*.[2] It is of Roman origin and may date from the period when Sikyon superseded Corinth in political significance.

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[1] For similar trenches at Syracuse, see *Athen. Mitt.* XXVI, pp. 9 ff.

[2] There are now visible two series of marks, — one on the side that faces the auditorium, and another on the top of the blocks. In both series we find a letter at each end. The former series has, from east to west, the following order: Block 1, none; 2, K Λ; 3, Λ Μ; 4, ᗺ ⌉; 5, ⌉ —; 6, Σ —; 7, — Σ; 8, Δ Ǝ; 9, H ⊟; 10, ⊟ I; 11, A ᗺ; 12, I —; 13, M — (covered up).

The series on top, which is less distinct, runs as follows, likewise from east to west: Block 1, none; 2, Δ Γ; 3, Λ —; 4, Μ —; 5, A̅ —; 6, Θ I; 7, I —; 8, K —; 9, — I; 10, I E; 11, I —; 12, E —; 13, — —.

ANDREW FOSSUM.

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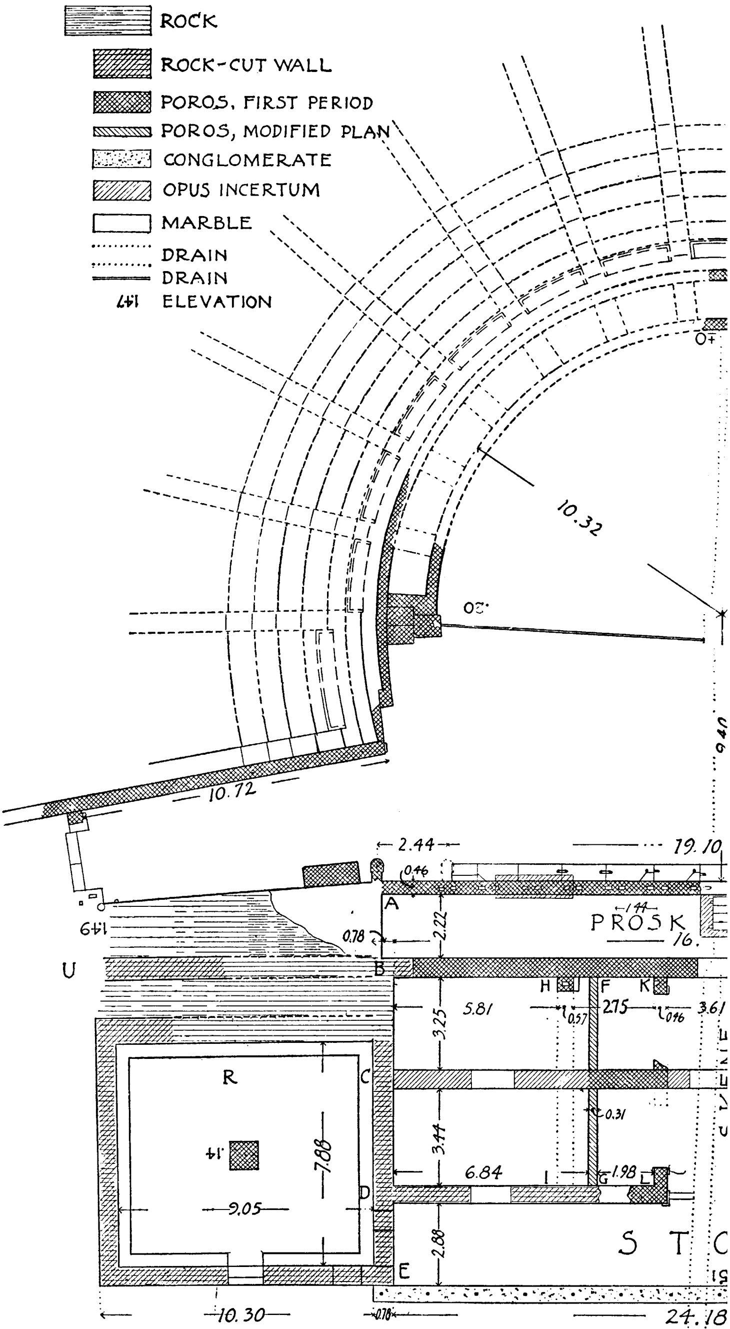
[1] See plan of 1889, *Am. J. Arch.* First Series, V, pl. ix.

[2] This explanation first occurred to me when the excavators of Priene showed me the plans and photographs of that theatre in 1898.



A. FOSSUM, FEC.

THEATRE

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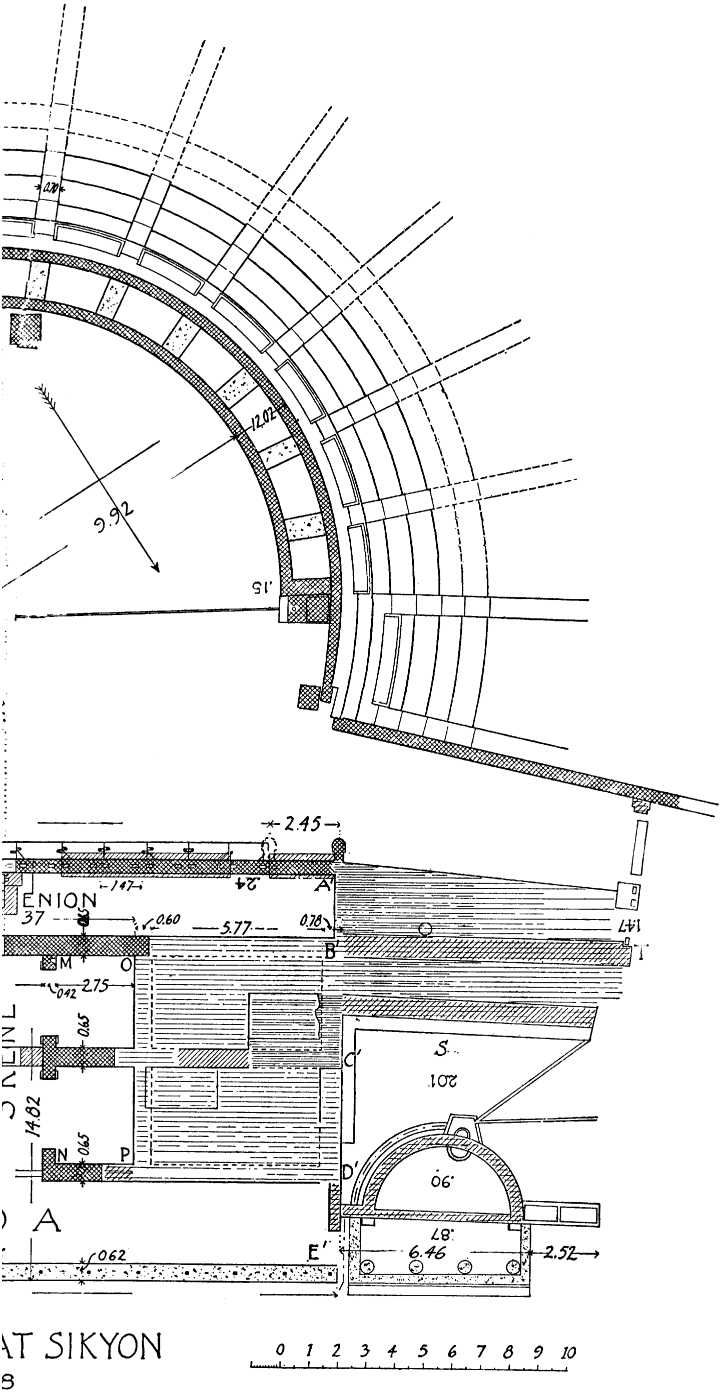
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AT SIKYON

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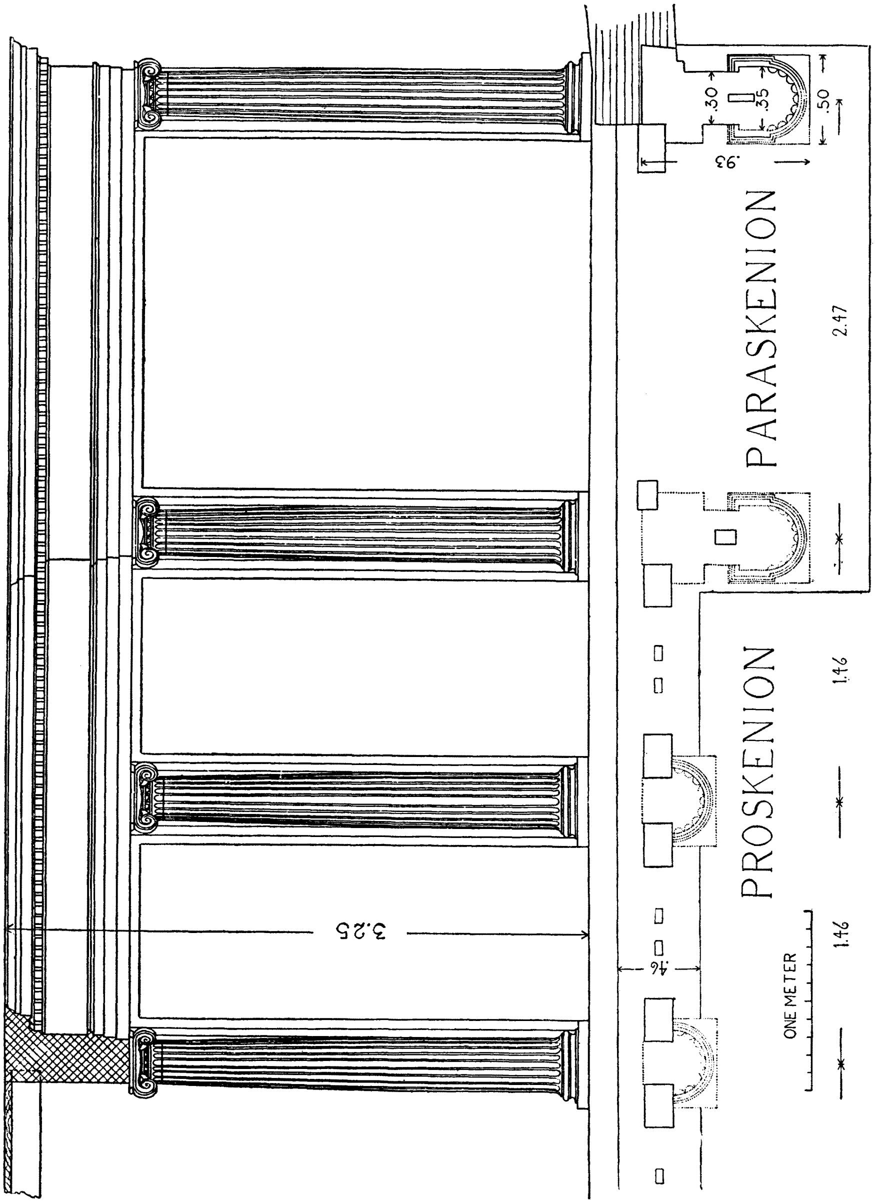

THEATRE AT SIKYON (1898)

Plan and elevation of Prosken on and of Paraskenia